CLAIMS

1.   (Currently Amended) A method for handling content request and delivery, comprising the steps of:

receiving at a headend at least one request for content sent upstream from at least one user over a first network;

sending the request for content upstream from a content server to a content library over a second network;

receiving at the content server content retrieved from the content library, based on the request, and sent downstream from the content library to the content server over a third network, wherein the third network is physically distinct from the second network; and

processing the retrieved content for delivery downstream to the user by buffering at the content server the retrieved content for delivery downstream to the user.

2.   (Canceled)

3.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim [[2]] 1, wherein the buffering of the retrieved content reduces variations in a rate of delivery of the retrieved content to the user.

4.   (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising sending the retrieved content downstream to the user over the first network.

5.   (Original) The method of claim 4, wherein the downstream bandwidth of the first network is greater than the upstream bandwidth of the first network.

6.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the first network includes an RF network.

7.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the third network has high bandwidth for delivering content downstream from the content library compared to the bandwidth of the second network for sending requests upstream to the content library.

8.   (Canceled)

9.   (Canceled)

10.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein after an initial request for content is sent to the content library, the step of sending a request for content is repeated for subsequent requests.

11.   (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein if content is lost before being delivered downstream to the user, a request for the lost content is sent upstream to the content library along with a subsequent request for content.

12.   (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein the step of sending a request for content is performed while content retrieved based on previously sent requests is received and processed.

13.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the requested content includes at least one of video data, audio data and binary large object data.

14.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the user is associated with a content-on-demand subscriber.

15.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the retrieved content received from the content library is in an encrypted form, and the step of processing further includes decrypting the encrypted retrieved content.

16.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of sending the request for content includes sending authentication information to gain access to the content in the content library.

17.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the content library is associated with a content library server that performs file system processing on the content retrieved from the content library.

18.   (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the content retrieved from the content library is received as raw data, and the step of processing includes performing file system processing on the retrieved content.

19.   (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of processing <u>further</u> includes transforming the retrieved content into a format suitable for delivery to the user.

20.   (Currently Amended) An apparatus for handling content request and delivery, comprising:

means for receiving <u>at a headend</u> at least one request for content sent upstream from at least one user over a first network;

means for sending the request upstream from a content server to a content library over a second network;

means for receiving content retrieved from the content library based on the request and sent downstream from the content library to the content server over a third network, wherein the third network is <u>physically</u> distinct from the second network; and

processing means for processing the retrieved content for delivery to the user, <u>wherein processing comprises at least buffering the retrieved content at the content server for delivery downstream to the user.</u>

21.   (Canceled)

22.   (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim [[21]] <u>20</u>, wherein the buffering means reduces variations in a rate of delivery of the retrieved content to the user.

23.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 20, further comprising means for sending the retrieved content downstream to the user over the first network.

24.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 23, wherein the downstream bandwidth of the first network is greater than the upstream bandwidth of the first network.

25.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the first network includes an RF network.

26.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the third network has high bandwidth for delivering content downstream from the content library compared to the bandwidth of the second network for sending requests upstream to the content library.

27.   (Canceled)

28.   (Canceled)

29.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein after an initial request for content it sent to the content library, the sending means sends subsequent requests.

30.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 29, wherein if content is lost before being delivered downstream to the user, a request for the lost content is sent upstream to the content library along with a subsequent request for content.

31.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 29, wherein the sending means sends requests for content while the content retrieved based on previously sent request is received by the receiving means and processed by the processing means.

32.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the requested content includes at least one of video data, audio data, and binary large object data.

33.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the user is associated with a content-on-demand subscriber.

34.   (Currently Amended) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the retrieved content received from the content library is in an encrypted form, and the processing means <u>further</u> includes means for decrypting the encrypted retrieved content.

35.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the means for sending the request for content sends authentication information to gain access to the content in the content library.

36.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the content library is associated with a content library server that performs file system processing on the content retrieved from the content library.

37.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the content retrieved from the content library is received as raw data, and the step of processing includes performing file system processing on the retrieved content.

38.   (Original) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the processing means transforms the retrieved content into a format suitable for delivery to the user.

39.   (Currently Amended) A system for handling content request and delivery, comprising:

a first network over which at least one request for content is received <u>at a headend that is</u> upstream from at least one user;

at least one content server for receiving the request for content sent upstream from the user over the first network;

a second network over which the request is sent upstream from the content server to a content library, the content library for receiving the request sent upstream from the content server, wherein content is retrieved from the content library based on the request; and

a third network for delivering the retrieved content from the content library downstream

to the content server, <u>wherein the second network and the third network are physically distinct networks,</u> and wherein the content server processes the retrieved content for delivery downstream to the user <u>by buffering at the content server the retrieved content for delivery downstream to the user</u>.

40.   (Canceled)

41.   (Currently Amended) The system of claim [[40]] <u>39</u>, wherein the buffering reduces variations in a rate of delivery of the retrieved content.

42.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 39, wherein the content server sends the retrieved content downstream to the user over the first network.

43.   (Original) The system of claim 42, wherein the downstream bandwidth of the first network is greater than the upstream bandwidth of the first network.

44.   (Original) The system of claim 39, wherein the first network includes an RF network.

45.   (Original) The system of claim 39, wherein the third network has high bandwidth for delivering content downstream from the content library compared to the bandwidth of the second network for sending requests upstream to the content library.

46.   (Canceled)

47.   (Canceled)

48.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 39, wherein after an initial request for content is sent to the content library, the content server continues sending subsequent requests for content.

49.   (Original) The system of claim 48, wherein if content is lost before being delivered downstream to the user, a request for the lost content is sent upstream to the content library along with a subsequent request for content.

50.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 48, wherein the content server continues requesting content from the content library while content is being retrieved based on previously sent requests, delivered to the content server, and processed by the content server.

51.   (Original) The system of claim 39, wherein the requested content includes at least one of video data, audio data, and binary large object data.

52.   (Original) The system of claim 39, wherein the user associated with a content-on-demand subscriber.

53.   (Currently Amended) The system of claim 39, wherein the content is received at the content server in an encrypted form, and the processing performed by the content server further includes decrypting the retrieved content.

54.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 39, wherein the content server sends authentication information with the request for content to the content library to gain access to the content in the content library.

55.   (Original) The system of claim 39, wherein the content library is associated with a content library server that performs file system processing on the content retrieved from the content library.

56.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 39, wherein the content retrieved from the content library and sent to the content server is raw data, and the content server performs file system processing on the retrieved content.

57.   (Previously Presented) The system of claim 39, wherein the content server transforms the retrieved content into a format suitable for delivery to the user.